

Message Text

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DEPT PLEASE PASS AGRICULTURE FAS FOR G&F

E.O. 11652: NA
TAGS: EGEN, EAGR, HU
SUBJECT: HUNGARIAN CROP SITUATION

REFS: A) BUDAPEST 2149 B) STATE 161399

1. SUMMARY: SPECIAL BRIEFING ARRANGED BY EMBASSY AT MINISTRY
AGRICULTURE INDICATES RECENT HEAVY RAINS CAUSED SOME DAMAGE
TO WHEAT BUT LITTLE OR NO DAMAGE TO OTHER CROPS.
EXPECTATIONS FOR 1975 HARVEST ARE NO WORSE THAN 1974. RAINS
ACTUALLY BENEFITED CORN, OILSEEDS AND SUGAR BEETS WHICH NOW
DEVELOPING TWO WEEKS AHEAD OF NORMAL SCHEDULE. END SUMMARY.

2. AT REQUEST EMBASSY (REF A) HUNGARIAN MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE
ARRANGED SPECIAL BRIEFING FOR COMMERCIAL OFFICER AND AGATT ON JULY
10 ON RECENT CROP CONDITIONS FOLLOWING EARLY JULY HEAVY RAINS AND
SUBSEQUENT FLOODING. BRIEFING GIVEN BY DR. ISTVAN MESZAROS,
DIRECTOR OF ORGANIZATIONAL CONTROL DEPARTMENT IN MINAG WHO HAD JUST
COMPLETED AIR SURVEY OF CROP CONDITIONS. FOLLOWING MAJOR POINTS
EMERGED FROM CANDID, ANIMATED 75 MINUTE BRIEFING AND COVER MAJOR
ITEMS OF LIST OF QUESTIONS PROMPTLY PROVIDED BY FAS IN REF B.

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3. CURRENT EXPECTATIONS FOR CEREAL CROPS ARE NO WORSE THAN IN

1974. CONDITIONS OF CROPS THIS YEAR ARE ACTUALLY BETTER THAN LAST BECAUSE OF GREATER DENSITY AND BETTER DEVELOPMENT DUE TO FAVORABLE SINTER AND SPRING WEATHER. IN ABSENCE OF RECENT HEAVY RAINS HUNGARY COULD HAVE HARVESTED RECORD CEREAL CROP. RAINS, HOWEVER, DID CAUSE SOME DAMAGE TO CEREALS, MAINLY WHEAT, BECAUSE SOME 30 PERCENT WAS KNOCKED DOWN BY RAINS AND STORMS. WITH LODGING LOSSES EXPECTED SOMEWHAT LARGER THAN LAST YEAR OFFICIALS BELIEVE HARVEST RESULTS ON CEREALS MAY ONLY MATCH LAST YEAR'S LEVEL. THIS IMPLIES HUNGARY MAY AGAIN HARVEST ABOUT SIX MILLION METRIC TONS CEREAL GRAINS.

4. FLOOD LOSSES ARE MINIMAL. ACCORDING TO MESZAROS, HUNGARIANS WERE SO SUCCESSFUL LIMITING FLOOD THAT THE NET RESULT WAS TO "EXPORT FLOOD" TO NEIGHBORING YUGOSLAVIA AND ROMANIA. WATER DAMAGE IS RESTRICTED TO ABOUT 105,000 HECTARES RESULTING PRIMARILY FROM RAIN AND LACK OF RUNOFF. ONLY ABOUT 50,000 HECTARES OF CROP LAND (MAINLY CORN) IS EFFECTED AS BALANCE OF LAND PASTURE. OFFICIALS HOPE THAT PORTION OF WET CORN CAN BE SAVED BY HARVEST TIME AFTER LAND DRIES.

5. THERE ARE NO SERIOUS DELAYS IN HARVESTING AND AGMIN OFFICIALS BELIEVE IF NEXT TWO WEEKS REMAIN RAINLESS, THIS WILL PERMIT COMPLETION OF HARVEST OF CEREALS CROP IN GOOD SHAPE. THERE ARE ADEQUATE HARVESTING COMBINES IN FIELD AND DRYERS ARE RUNNING 24 HOURS A DAY TO PREPARE WET CEREALS FOR STORAGE.

6. RECENT RAINS WERE BENEFICIAL TO CORN, SUGAR BEETS, POTATOES AND OILSEEDS. THIS, TOGETHER WITH GOOD SPRING WEATHER TENDED TO SPEED UP THEIR DEVELOPMENT WHICH NOW ABOUT TWO WEEKS AHEAD OF NORMAL. THIS BENEFICIAL TO HUNGARIANS BECAUSE THERE WILL BE LESS CHANCE TO EXPOSE HARVEST, PARTICULARLY OF CORN, TO HAZARDS OF FALL WEATHER. MINAG OFFICIALS HOPE CORN CROP IN 1975 WILL EXCEED 1974 CROP OF 6.2 MILLION METRIC TONS BY COMFORTABLE MARGIN.

7. HUNGARY IN RECENT YEARS HAD CARRY-OVER STOCK OF SOME 1.5 MILLIONS IN OFF-FARM POSITIONS AND HAD MAINTAINED A STEADY LEVEL TO TAKE CARE OF UNUSUAL FLUCTUATIONS IN YIELDS. THERE HAS BEEN NO CHANGE IN THIS POLICY.

8. AS RESULT OF CURRENT APPRAISAL OF CROP CONDITIONS, HUNGARY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MAY AGAIN EXPORT APPROXIMATELY 1 MIL TONS OF WHEAT IN 1975/76 AND PERHAPS EVEN A LARGER QUANTITY OF CORN IF EXPECTATIONS FOR RECORD CROP MATERIALIZE.

9. COMMENT: EMBASSY DELIGHTED WITH HUNGARIAN ATTITUDE TOWARDS BRIEFING. CANDID MEETING ESTABLISHED IMPORTANT PRECEDENT IN AREA IN WHICH WE LONG SOUGHT FURTHER COOPERATION FROM HUNGARIANS. THIS BREAKTHROUGH FIRST TANGIBLE RESULT OF UNDERSECRETARY CAMPBELL'S MAY

VISIT TO HUNGARY. DURING BRIEFING DR. MESZAROS, WHO HIMSELF IS ESTABLISHED AUTHORITY ON CROP PRODUCTION AND AUTHOR OF NUMEROUS ARTICLES, WAS EAGER TO TALK AND INDICATED THAT IN TWO WEEKS WHEN ABOUT 80 PERCENT HARVEST CEREAL EXPECTED TO BE COMPLETED, HE WILL BE IN BETTER POSITION TO JUDGE OUTCOME CROP DAMAGE FROM RECENT RAINS. EMBASSY WILL NATURALLY FOLLOW-UP ON THIS IMPORTANT CONTACT AND PASS FINDINGS TO WASHINGTON. IT MAY TURN OUT THAT DR. MESZAROS' HARVEST PREDICTIONS ARE OPTIMISTIC SINCE EVEN AS THIS CABLE IS BEING TYPED A STEADY RAIN IS FALLING.

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